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Mythology of India

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1. VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS MYTHOLOGY IN INDIA

There are at least three well-distinguished varieties of religious mythology native to India. One of these is that of tribes still living in a preliterate condition, either not yet absorbed in Hinduism or else only in the early stages of acculturation, recognizing their own local deities and largely unaware of the great Hindu gods and their mythology. These tribes' religious conceptions and myths are known to us from investigations made in modern times by enthnologists, folklorists, missionaries, administrators, educators, and others. Their mythology is only with difficulty capable of systemization. It is fragmentarily reported and the ideas are hard for field workers to identify and assess, often varying widely within a single language group or even a single tribe. Nearly always this mythology shows some relationship to classical Hindu mythology, but it also shows a great deal of independence. It will not be discussed in this chapter, which the terms of assignment restrict to the ancient.

The second kind of mythology is that which is attached to faiths founded by known persons; Buddhism and Jainism are in this category. In Buddhism the mythology is centered on the historical Buddha, and while there exists a good deal of Buddhist mythology which is not Buddhacentric, it is of less

importance in the faith. We may compare the mythology of Buddhism in this respect to that of Christianity, which is chiefly Christocentric. Jainism has a mythology which treats almost exclusively of the twenty-four Tirthankaras or Saviors, all but the last two of whom are without historical basis, and with ancillary figures associated with them, the whole well enough articulated for their mythology to have been compiled by the medieval monk Hemachandra (1089–1173) in a single large work known as the Trishashtishalakapurushacharita or *Adventures of the Sixty-three Outstanding Personages.*

Standing in contrast to such relatively unified and articulated mythologies is the third variety, that of Hinduism, which can in no way be given a unity. Hinduism is much more than a religion; it is a total way of life, incorporating the customs, beliefs, practices, institutions of peoples in all parts of the subcontinent developed at all periods of human settlement there. As a religion Hinduism has set side by side in peaceful coexistence every shade of belief ranging from the most primitive sort of animism to a highly sophisticated philosophical monism, and with this has gone a corresponding range of worship or practice extending from the simplest sort of effort to propitiate fertility or vegetation or disease spirits to the most concentrated meditation designed to produce knowledge of abstract impersonal reality. The whole is a conglomerate, a chaotic chance association, at best a loose confederation. Theologically Hinduism is not a single religion but many religions, tolerating one another within the shifting social framework of caste. To see them as a unified and coherent whole would be as difficult as to find unity and coherence in the total landscape of the subcontinent.

It would not be possible to survey all of India's immense mythology within the compass of this chapter, but a few parts will be discussed which have a special interest as symbolizing ideas which have been important in the development of religious thought there.

2. THE PROCESS OF CREATION

Our oldest literary records of India lie in the *Rig Veda*, composed in an archaic form of Sanskrit by Aryans who entered India from the northwest probably between 1500 and 1200 B.C. This work was presumably compiled by 1000 B.C. and consists of 1028 hymns by various priestly authors for use in the public Vedic sacrifice, through which the Aryan gods were gratified and strengthened and in return aided the patron of the sacrifice to achieve his legitimate aims. In this way men and gods collaborated to keep the universe operating smoothly and thwart the machinations of demons and their misguided human allies. There is a vast amount of mythology in the *Rig Veda* and the other closely allied and slightly later texts which all together constitute the body of Vedic literature, not presented in clear direct narrative or discussed in systematic exposition, but only indicated, hinted at, alluded to, or implied in terms that make its reconstruction a complicated and difficult procedure. The problem is somewhat like that which would face an investigator trying to reconstruct Christian mythology from church hymnals. The chief figure in the Rigvedic pantheon, however, is Indra—many more hymns are addressed to him than to any other deity—and his myth is the work's central theme. That myth largely concerns creation, and in brief form it is as follows.

In the beginning, before our universe existed, there were beings called Asura, a name which means something like "living power." One of these was a demon named Vritra, a masculine form beside which there is a neuter stem *vṛtra*, meaning "covering." We can see that Vritra the demon is a personification of *vṛtra*, the covering. Vritra is called a Danava, that is, "descendant of Danu, something having the character of Danu." This last is a feminine stem, derived from a root *dā*, "bind, restrain," and *dānu* means, therefore, "bondage,

restraint." As such Danu is Restraint personified, and when Vritra is called a Danava, the meaning is that he too personifies restraint. Though Vritra has a mother named Danu, there is no father mentioned for him. The reason is simple; he is the manifestation of an abstraction, and when that abstraction is expressed as a feminine stem, the feminine gender of the stem furnishes a basis for giving him a mother. The metaphor, in short, is taken literally. But there was no metaphorical use of a masculine stem to provide him a father as well; hence the question of his paternity can be ignored. In post-Rigvedic times there are other Danavas besides Vritra; that is, the name Danava is applied to allies or subordinates which Vritra is said to have. In the *Rig Veda*, as in later times, they are called rakshas or rakshasa "demon," or sometimes Vritras. Also in later times they are called Daitya, which is a derivative from another feminine stem *diti*, meaning "bondage, restraint," coming from the same verbal root *dā*, "bind." Vritra is the archdemon of the *Rig Veda*, and he and his cohorts represent evil.

Besides Vritra and the Danavas there are other Asuras called Aditya. This is a derivative from a feminine abstract stem *a-diti*, meaning "non-bondage, non-restraint, release," and *āditya* means both "pertaining to release" and "descendant of Aditi." Thus the Adityas, too, have a mother, named Aditi, so that they are called outright "sons of Aditi" (*aditeḥ putrāḥ*) and their mother figures frequently in the *Rig Veda* as a benevolent feminine divinity, but again nowhere is a father mentioned for them. The chief of the Adityas is Varuna, whose name has so far defied all attempts to find it a convincing etymology. The Adityas represent good in the *Rig Veda*.

The Adityas and the Danavas were in a state of active hostility with each other; it might be right to call it a state of war. The Adityas were being worsted or at least were having no success against the Danavas. They needed a champion. This they got in the person of Indra, another Rigvedic figure whose name has never been satisfactorily explained in spite of many efforts, though his character and

quality seem indicated by the epithets "son of might" (*sahasaḥ putraḥ*) or "lord or husband of might/Might" (*śacīpatiḥ*). Indra's parentage is uncertain, but perhaps the best deduction is that he was the son of Heaven and Earth, conceived and born at a time when these two were living together or had a common house. The birth was miraculous, apparently from his mother's side, as in later times was that of the Buddha. When first born, Indra remained in concealment, but he shortly got a drink of a powerful beverage called soma, which in one version of the legend he found on his mother's breast and in another got when it was brought him by an eagle, possibly the moon. The drink caused him to swell to an enormous and terrifying size, so terrifying that Sky and Earth flew apart, to stay so forever, while he filled the space between them, whence it can be said that he made his mother a widow and so is "the youngest or last [child]," while his realm of activity was the atmosphere, lying between heaven and earth, the region in which both gods and men move and act. He was not himself normally called Asura; rather he was called *deva*, "god," a term applied to the original children of Sky and Earth, namely the Dawn Ushas, etymologically equivalent to Greek Eos and Latin Aurora, and the two Ashvins or Sons of the Sky (*divo napātā*), a name corresponding in meaning to their Greek counterparts, the Dioskouroi.

The Adityas, and with them presumably the other gods, besought Indra to be their champion, but he, though young, was no innocent, and before accepting he stipulated that he should become their king. To this they had to agree. He now went forth to do battle with Vritra. Tvashtri, the artificer of the gods, had forged for him a weapon called vajra, which tradition regularly identifies as the lightning bolt, and when he had fortified himself with three great beakers of soma and thus increased his size and strength he attacked Vritra, whom the text describes as a serpent lying upon the mountains. The battle was fierce. Sometimes the hymns tell us that Indra fought alone; sometimes they say he had helpers consisting of Rudra and the Maruts, understood to be storm gods. Vritra was not only mighty, but crafty and full of magic

wiles. Nevertheless neither his might nor his magic availed him. Indra finally brought down his vajra on him and broke his back, or, as is also said, burst his belly, or, as is still further said, split open the mountains. In the conflict he slew Danu as well, and the stricken mother lay upon her dead son.

When the fight was over it became apparent what the Adityas and the Danavas had been quarreling about. For out of the shattered mountains, or out of a cave, or variantly out of Vritra's belly, emerged the cosmic Waters, motherly females who had longed to escape confinement. They came out now like lowing cattle, flowing over the prostrate body of their former restrainer and lord Vritra, to acknowledge Indra as their new lord. And, astonishingly, the Waters were pregnant, and their embryo was the Sun.

All that was needed to construct the universe was now at hand: sky, earth, the atmosphere—the three parts of Vedic man's world—moisture from the Waters, heat and light from the Sun. Creation consisted first in differentiating the Sat from the Asat. Sat means the Existent, that is, the world of the Existent, the universe in which men and gods move. The Asat is the Non-Existent, the region of the demons, which lacks heat and light. The Sat, we are informed in the *Rig Veda,* was born from the Asat (10.72.2,3), which latter is described as now situated below the earth and reached by a great chasm, a place of terror, where the demons carry and destroy the wicked. The Sat was established with its three parts, and a pathway was made in the undersurface of the vaulted stone sky to be a course for the Sun to travel. The cosmic Waters took their abode in the sky, whence they let down moisture to the earth. Everything was put in order and set operating under rules devised for control, and different deities had separate departmental functions for supervising the operation. All this systemization and regulation was known as rita (*ṛta*), which means etymologically "set in motion" and has the idea in the *Rig Veda* of cosmic truth or order. Over the rita presided Varuna, the leader of the Adityas, seated in heaven and ever watching to see that no one

violated any of the laws that together constituted the rita. Some passages in the *Rig Veda* say that Indra, or Indra and the gods, celebrated creation or even effected creation in a dance, where they "raised the dust."

In some other passages the gods are pictured as co-operating to institute the first sacrifice, at which time they pronounced the names of things and creatures, whereupon these came into existence. Later, the first man came into existence as a son of Vivasvant "the Wide-shining [Sun]," his function being to perform the sacrifice on earth and so strengthen the gods for the maintenance of the rita through the execution of their duties and the frustration of their demonic and human opponents.

How are we to interpret this myth? That is, what are the ideas which are symbolized in this story of anthropomorphic and theriomorphic beings? What had been going on in Vedic man's mind? We do not need to resort to psychoanalytic speculations; we can instead deal with material which seems to lie on the surface or at least not very far below it. The answer seems to be somewhat as follows. In the beginning was chaos. To be sure, all the elements needed to produce our universe existed in that chaos, but they were not in an ordered and operating state. Some of them, essential ones, were held or restrained within a hard covering, where they could not be used. Heaven and earth existed, too, though they were then joined together. Forces of expansion and release were present, however, tendencies conducive to the ordered arrangement and setting in motion of the parts of the universe, but their activity was insufficient to overcome inertia. There was a deadlock until power was generated of heaven and earth. This first drove heaven and earth apart, filling the space between them. Then, with the use of mobile fire, it overcame inertia, piercing the hard covering and releasing the reservoirs of water and the sun. The parts of the cosmos were now put into order or harmony and set in motion, to run like a machine. All, however, remained subject to power. Continued harmonious operation of the cosmic machine depended upon the performance of the sacrifice by

men and gods in collaboration, each strengthening the other. This last was a never-ending process. Trends toward disorder were not completely eliminated when power set everything going. Every day the sun sinks and must be brought up again out of the black space below the earth; water must fall from heaven to nurture plants and provide food; and man must do his part in producing these phenomena. And everywhere the resistance of inertia must unceasingly be obviated.

We cannot say, because we have no direct evidence, that the impersonal and abstract basis is either older or younger than the concrete anthropomorphic myth. It is possible that the substance of the myth once existed without any kind of metaphysical rationalization such as is here suggested. Further, the myth, which is not Indo-European in character in spite of some echoes and parallels in Iranian mythology contemporary with it, also has wider affinities to the even older Sumerian and Assyrian mythology. This last may have reached the Indo-Iranians when they arrived in northern Iran. There the two parts of their community appear to have handled the Mesopotamian material in different ways, and the version developed by the Indo-Aryans acquired the particular form which we find in the *Rig Veda.* Though this theory is not implausible, it contains a good deal of the speculative and cannot be affirmed as a certainty.

It does seem certain, however, that the myth had a metaphysical meaning to some thinkers toward the end of the Rigvedic period, for we see it being challenged or being displaced by other explanations, which nevertheless reveal their subsurface relationship to the Indra-Vritra myth. These present some of the same problems, sometimes using the same verbalisms, but offering more sophisticated answers. They question and even reject outright the myth of an anthropomorphic demiurge imposing his righteous will upon an evil, resistant demon, and instead they substitute another kind of personal deity differently conceived or an impersonal force of some sort. There is a well-known pair of hymns which bear upon this point. In one of them (2.12) the power of Indra is affirmed and his qualities and deeds are extolled,

with an implicit warning to people not to doubt him. The other (10.121) does not refer to Indra by name, but recites powers and deeds regularly ascribed to him, and in each case, in successive stanzas, asks who the god is whom men should worship with oblation, obviously meaning that the god is not Indra. In the final stanza the hymn gives the answer. The god, up to this point unmentioned and unidentified, is there named as Prajapati, "Lord of Creatures." This god is a kind of abstraction with no particular personality in the *Rig Veda*, who becomes a prominent figure not long afterward in the Brahmanas, where he is a supreme overseer god. A further implied denial of Indra appears in connection with an epithet given him in effecting creation when he is called the All-Maker (*viśvakarman* 8.98.2; 9.63.7). But elsewhere a separate deity is posited called Vishvakarman (10.81; 10.82), who proceeds in quite a different way than by slaying a demon and himself creates all, including the gods. Another kind of repudiation of Indra appears in connection with the feat of separating the Sat from the Asat. This it is stated Indra accomplished (6.24.5), but in another hymn (10.72) the feat is ascribed to the gods, after they had been brought into existence, when they performed the first sacrifice. That is, power lies in the sacrifice, not in Indra. The power of the sacrifice is indeed considered by some late Rigvedic sages to be supreme, and the final word respecting it in that work appears in the celebrated Purushasukta (10.90). There the gods effect creation by celebrating the first sacrifice with all the unordered elements of the cosmos being contained within the body of the sacrificial victim conceived as a gigantic anthropomorphic male (*puruṣa*), who encompasses all the universe which we know and extends beyond it.

The best known of the so-called "philosophical hymns" of the *Rig Veda* (10.129) shows us that work's most transcendent adaptation of the Indra-Vritra myth. In the beginning there was neither the Asat nor the Sat, neither the Non-Existent nor the Existent. There was no sky nor heavenly vault beyond it. What covered all? Where? What was its protection? Was there a fathomless depth of the waters?

For "covered" the text uses the verb *vṛ*, from which is also derived the name Vritra. The hymn goes on to say that there was then neither death nor immortality nor distinction between day and night. The first existent, called That One (*tad ekam*), though uninspired by any outside breath, breathed through its own potentiality, that is, came into existence spontaneously. Besides it nothing existed. There was darkness hidden by darkness at the beginning. This all was an undifferentiated flood. That which had the potentiality of becoming was hidden by a shell and was born through the power of its own heat. In the beginning desire came upon That [One], which One became the first seed of mind. The sages searching in their hearts with pious insight (that is, by introspection) found the relation of the Sat (the Existent) with the Asat (the Non-Existent). A line of demarcation was extended horizontally for them. What was below it, what above it? There were seed depositors, there were powers; there was potentiality here below, there was emanation above. Who is there who knows, who here can tell whence the origin, and whence this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation of the universe (that is, they too were created by something superior to themselves). Who knows then whence it came into being? This creation, whence it came into being, whether it placed itself (that is, was spontaneous, not created) or not—he who is its overseer in highest heaven, he surely knows, or perhaps he knows not. From this final statement we may infer that the author of the hymn thinks even Prajapati is ignorant of his origin and the origin of the universe; only the sages by mystic introspection have been able to discover the truth.

From then on in Brahmanical speculation on cosmogony the anthropomorphic figures of Indra and Vritra are absent, but there remain the concepts of material in chaos and will-directed power to give it order. The prevailing notion is of a primeval state in which the elements of the material universe are undiscriminated. Some force, often said to be soul or souls, moves in the mass and so differentiates the phenomenal universe. Or the souls may be quiescent until

set into activity by the accumulated karma (force generated by their actions in previous existences) associated with them and so produce differentiation. The universe thus comes into existence. It passes through successive stages of deterioration from perfection until it finally reaches a state of maximum evil, whereupon it dissolves into nothingness or quiescence, to remain so for an astronomical period of time, after which a new creation takes place. The process has gone on and is to go on indefinitely in a cycle that reaches backward beyond our imagining and will extend forward beyond it also. This is the viewpoint roughly of the Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika philosophies, of the epics, and of the Puranas. Varying somewhat from this are the conceptions of the Former Mimansa system, and the still different ones of the Later Mimansa, which is generally known as the Vedanta. At almost all points the thinking is in terms of the impersonal, both with respect to the inert material of the universe and to the effective power that moves it, differentiates it, gives it form. The myth which symbolized the earliest Brahmanic philosophizing had by this time ceased to serve a purpose for those who were in the stream of speculative philosophical development, yet it was part of the hidden foundation on which their systems were erected.

3. THE CULTURE HERO AS DEITY

Modern Hinduism is for the most part divided between those sects devoted to the worship of Vishnu and ancillary figures and those devoted to Shiva and figures associated with him. Each of these two great gods is a syncretic deity, combining in his over-all self many different separate deities who have become blended with the capital figure, while their names have also become his names. Further, Shiva has a wife and Vishnu has two wives, and each wife is a syncretic

deity as well, uniting in her person more than one female deity and bearing the names of all. It is admittedly impossible to identify the original figure in either the Shiva or the Vishnu complex. We find both the name Vishnu and the adjective shiva (*śiva*, "kindly") in the *Rig Veda*, but this fact does not necessarily mean in either case that the element in the syncretism denoted by the word is the god's oldest or original element. There may be other elements, coming from non-Aryan sources, of equal or even greater antiquity, possibly autochthonous in contrast to the Aryan element, which last may not have been known in India until the arrival of the Aryans in the second millennium B.C.

The god Vishnu combines in himself an unusually large number of forms. He may be conceived as Vishnu embodying the totality of his various elements, or as the striding, ascending, conquering hero sun (Vikrama or Vishnu) or as the brilliant shining sun (Surya), or as any one of his ten major avataras or incarnations—the word *avatāra* means "descent [from his supernal form in heaven] to earth"—or in any one of his lesser avataras, sometimes enumerated as twenty-two, to which we may add the further statement that his incarnations are really innumerable. His magnetic capacity to attract other figures to himself is a dynamic one; all over India there are shrines to local godlings whom worshipers characterize as aspects of Vishnu. At the beginning of the present century there were Hindus who expected, and Christians who feared, that Christianity in India might be absorbed in Hinduism through an identification of Christ as an avatara of Vishnu.

Not all the forms of Vishnu receive much worship; for example, the historical Buddha is the ninth of Vishnu's ten major avataras, but he has no cult of any note. The two most popular aspects of Vishnu are the seventh and eight avataras as Rama Chandra and Krishna. Each of these, like every other form of Vishnu, has his own separate mythology, and each of these mythologies is in its turn a blend of mythologies about separate elements that have come to constitute the whole composite figure. We may consider here certain fea-

tures of that which aureates Rama Chandra, commonly known simply as Rama, whose story is narrated in the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* (Tale of Rama).

Rama is, first, the pattern of the temporal aristocracy, the group of castes known as Kshatriya. As a prince his character is represented as without reproach; as a ruler he was the ideal king, and *rāmarājya,* "rule of Rama," is a synonym for the lost Golden Age and for the future Utopia. He seems also to have been a vegetation deity, perhaps representing the fertilizing function of the sky, while his wife Sita, whose name means "Furrow," symbolizes the productive earth. Their fate is interwoven with that of the demon Ravana, the archvillain of the *Ramayana,* perhaps originally some malevolent power of nature that opposed the fecundating mission of Rama and Sita. Third, Rama is the mythic agent for spreading Aryan (that is, Brahmanic or Sanskrit) culture to the then un-Aryanized south of India, where even now Aryan culture is primarily a possession of the Brahmans overlying a substratum which is chiefly Dravidian. These three strains of his character seem to have been fused by the fifth or fourth century B.C. in an early form of the *Ramayana.* Later, other elements were added: an introductory narrative explaining that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu, while Sita is an incarnation of Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort, and a conclusion telling of her banishment and life with her two sons in the hermitage of Valmiki, the traditional author of the epic.

The received text of the total *Ramayana* begins with the theme of Ravana, demon king of Lanka (Ceylon), who had once received a promise from the god Brahma that he should not be killed by god or demon. In his overweening insolence he was oppressing the world, above all interfering with the sages' holy sacrificial rites, necessary to both men and gods. At about this time King Dasharatha of Ayodhya, in northern India, had been performing a horse sacrifice that he might procure an heir; for, though he had three wives, none had borne him a son. The gods had come to get their share of the offerings and, pleased with the sacrifice, they promised

that the king would have his wish. Then they went to Brahma to ask for some remedy of the evil he had caused by his criminal generosity to Ravana. Brahma, realizing that Ravana had left himself vulnerable in not demanding that he be immune to man as well as to god and demon, advised the gods to beseech Vishnu that he incarnate himself for the purpose of slaying the demon. The gods made the request and Vishnu consented. To fulfill his promise Vishnu caused himself to be incarnated as four sons of King Dasharatha, that is, as Rama and his brothers Lakshmana, Shatrughna, and Bharata. At the same time, at Vishnu's request, the gods mated with various kinds of non-human, semi-divine females, such as apsarases, kinnaris, and others, to produce in swarms the vanaras (monkeys) and other creatures that were to be Rama's allies in the future war with Ravana.

Before Rama was sixteen years old he went out on a series of adventures, in the course of which he married the peerless Sita, daughter of King Janaka, won when he bent a bow that no one else could master. Shortly after he got back home, King Dasharatha decided to abdicate and nominated Rama as heir apparent, but Queen Kaikeyi, mother of Rama's half-brother Bharata, by now claiming a boon granted her long before by the king and since then held in reserve, had Bharata nominated in Rama's place and Rama sent into exile for fourteen years. Rama set forth accompanied by Sita and his brother Lakshmana. They wandered in the forest, dwelling at the hermitages of various sages, and at last settled down at Panchavati beside the river Godavari, on the northern edge of the Deccan plateau, where they built a hut and lived in happiness.

While they were dwelling there, a loathsome demoness Shurpanakha ("she who has nails like winnowing baskets"), sister of Ravana, chanced to see Rama and made advances to him, which he repulsed. She complained to Ravana, who sent out fourteen demons to slay Rama, and then 14,000, all of whom were defeated, but one named Akampana escaped to Lanka, Ravana's capital, to report the affair. Enraged, Ravana vowed to slay Rama but was advised by Akampana

not to attack him; rather he should abduct Sita, whereupon Rama would quickly pine away to death. The plan was for one of Ravana's warriors named Maricha to take the form of a golden deer with silver spots, show himself near Rama's hut, and beguile him into pursuit. Rama slew Maricha, but as Maricha died he emitted a great cry in a voice exactly like Rama's, "Sita! Lakshmana!" Sita compelled Lakshmana to go to Rama's aid. This was Ravana's chance. In the form of a wandering mendicant he came to Sita and got her to tell her story. Then he revealed himself as Ravana and offered her himself and his kingdom. She rejected him, he took his true form and violently put her in his ass-drawn air-traveling chariot and headed for Lanka. On the way he was attacked by a giant vulture which destroyed the chariot, but Ravana beat him down and continued to Lanka. There he installed Sita in his palace and renewed his suit, but again he was repulsed.

Meanwhile Rama and Lakshmana, distraught at the loss of Sita, wandered about until they chanced upon the vulture, which with his dying words told them of his battle with Ravana. They went south in their search, met a headless monster who was under a curse, and Rama cut off his arms, whereupon he was released from his curse. He advised them to get aid from Sugriva, rightful king of the vanaras (monkeys) but now ousted by his usurper brother Valin. Rama slew Valin, restored Sugriva to his throne, and won him as ally. The rainy season now came on, and when it was over, Rama and his allies set out to find Sita. Sugriva's general, a monkey named Hanuman, discovered from the dead vulture's brother that Sita had been taken to Lanka, a hundred leagues (*yojana*) across the sea. With one gigantic leap Hanuman crossed the water and came to the magnificent city of Lanka. There at night he reduced himself to the size of a cat, entered the city, conquered its guardian spirit, and came unobserved to Sita's presence in time to hear her again refuse Ravana. When Ravana had left he revealed himself, showing a ring Rama had given him for identification, and offered to take her to Rama, but she declined on the ground that as a

faithful wife she could allow no male to touch her but her husband. Hanuman left her, destroyed a temple, and was caught by the demons with the aid of a magic charm. He was taken to Ravana but escaped a sentence of death on pleading that he was an envoy and therefore inviolable. However, he was punished for the harm he had done by having an oil-soaked cloth tied to his tail and ignited. The fire did him no harm, thanks to a Truth Act Sita had performed by her chastity, and he leaped from place to place in Lanka setting houses on fire, and then leaped back to the Indian mainland.

To get to Lanka, Sugriva's forces built a bridge of trees, stones, and mountains. The battle was long and fierce. Rama accomplished nothing by shooting at Ravana's ten heads, for as fast as a head was shot off another grew in its place. Finally he discharged a heavenly arrow which he owned, and this pierced Ravana's heart and the victory was won.

Hanuman now brought Sita in a palanquin, but when she approached, Rama made her dismount. Surprised at this conduct, yet enraptured to see her lord, she did so. Then Rama told her that he had fought the war and killed Ravana, not for love of her but to avenge his honor and restore broken laws. But for her he had no further use: Ravana had thrown his arms about her; she was stained forever. Vainly she protested her fidelity and at last asked Lakshmana to prepare a funeral pyre. Then she made another Truth Act by her chastity, to the effect that if she had always been a true wife, the fire should not injure her body. She entered the circle of flame, and the crowd shrieked. Then the god Brahma rolled back the flame, and Sita emerged unscathed, led out by Agni, god of fire, who restored her to Rama. Rama now declared that he had insisted upon such a test of Sita, not because he had any doubt of her, but because appearances were against her and he could not risk letting the folk think he would live with an impure woman as his wife.

Indra now restored the dead vanaras to life, and Rama returned to Ayodhya in a magic chariot. There Bharata gave back the throne, for he had all along acted only as regent.

Rama now ruled for ten thousand years. There was no death in his kingdom, no disease, no crime; the earth yielded abundantly; peace was unbroken. At the end of this period Rama returned to his form as Vishnu, transporting all the inhabitants of Ayodhya to Brahma's heaven without suffering death.

In the final (seventh) and later book of the *Ramayana,* Rama, bothered by gossip in the city, exiled Sita again, now pregnant, and she took refuge in the hermitage of Valmiki. There Rama one day discovered her and her twin sons, when as he was passing by he happened to hear the latter reciting his deeds as narrated by Valmiki, then in the process of composing the epic. He begged Sita to return to Ayodhya and reaffirm her purity. This ordeal, however, she could not endure. She made still another Act of Truth by her chastity, this time asking her mother, the Earth, to receive her. The ground opened, a throne appeared, the Earth placed her on it, and then it descended underground amid a rain of heavenly flowers.

No section of Hindu mythology is more deeply venerated than the tale of Rama and Sita. There are countless small shrines to Rama and others to Hanuman throughout India. Every autumn in most parts of India their story is enacted in a ten-day celebration. On the last night huge bamboo and paper figures of Ravana and his chief adjutants are burnt in a noisy and joyous conflagration, often with explosions of gunpowder that has been placed inside them. Thus righteousness triumphs again over evil.

The name of Rama is blessed throughout India, for one who calls upon Rama will not be refused. This is understood literally. For example, a story tells of a thief who was being punished with death by impalement. As he was dying he kept repeating the word *marā* (dead), but as he kept saying *"marā, marā, marā"* again and again, the syllables inadvertently came to form the name *"rāma rāma rāma"* and when he died he went to Rama's heaven. When Gandhi was assassinated, he died saying, *"He rām"* (O Ram), which words are inscribed today on his memorial at Delhi. The final

stage in the evolution of the Rama myth came with the great Hindu poet Tulsi Das (1532–1623), who composed a version of the *Ramayana* in which he describes Rama as the supreme soul and constantly, after relating each single incident in the story, invokes Rama in mystically phrased thought and prayer.

In this composite figure of Rama, which blends mighty warrior, forest-wandering pioneer, and carrier of culture—a kind of George Washington, Daniel Boone, and Hernando Cortez in one—the element which I would stress in this study is that of culture hero. Two names figure in Aryan mythology as carriers of Aryan civilization to South India. One of these is the doughty sage Agastya, a well-known character, who once swallowed the ocean and at another time caused the then lofty Vindhya Mountains to bow down before him when he was on his way to the south, to stay prostrate until he returned, but since he never returned they still lie low, unlike the towering Himalayas to the north of them. Agastya carried the *Veda* and the sacrificial fire to the south, which is a symbolic way of saying he civilized the region. Rama, the warrior, is represented in the *Ramayana* as having gone to visit Agastya some ten years or more after he went into exile, and at that time Agastya presented him with a bow that once belonged to Vishnu, an inexhaustible quiver, a javelin that had been Shiva's, and a sword. Rama's conquest of the south is by force of arms, as we have seen. He is thus represented as having brought culture and light to the aborigines, who when intransigent are called demons and when willing converts monkeys and bears. The social stigma of their state as something less than men, though possessing some human characteristics, is hardly removed by the later rationalization recorded in the *Ramayana* that gives them descent from the lesser gods and semi-divine females, a rationalization doubtless less inspired by a wish to soften Brahmanical Aryan contempt of non-Aryans than by a desire to give appropriate status to the allies of incarnate godhead in the battle of righteousness. It is possible and not implausible that the culture hero is the first element in the

Rama constellation, though we cannot prove it to be. His tale might even have a historical basis, and some scholars have endeavored to date it, but without getting general credence. There are other Aryan culture heroes, who are stated in varying terms to have civilized non-Aryan regions, such as Mathava Videgha, who followed the sacrificial fire Agni into Bihar, according to the *Shatapatha Brahmana.* But none of these has become identified with one of the great gods. Rama's elevation remains something of a mystery. Was it some other element in the complex that elevated the total? Or was it only when the full complex had come into existence that its importance caused it to be assimilated to Vishnu? We cannot say, but we may surmise that the latter is the more likely.

4. GOD IS LOVE

Krishna, the eighth avatara of Vishnu, encloses within himself two dissimilar personalities of probably separate origin, both of which were doubtless once conceived only as human beings. One presents Krishna as a bucolic hero living in the forests beside the Yamuna (Jumna) River near the city of Mathura (Muttra). His legend is widely familiar all over India; its best versions are in the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavata Purana,* a work possibly as old as A.D. eighth century, and in the *Vishnu Purana,* an earlier work. The other personality is as a warrior in the much more ancient epic, *Mahabharata,* who recited the celebrated mystic poem known as the *Bhagavad Gita* (Song of the Blessed One). The story attached to the first personality is briefly as follows.

In Mathura ruled the wicked King Kansa, who had been born to the queen of King Ugrasena but was not Ugrasena's son. A demon had seduced the queen by impersonating Ugrasena. Kansa had usurped the throne and was ruling with

such unprecedented tyranny that the earth, in the form of a cow, besought aid of the god Indra. The latter, accompanied by the other gods, went to Brahma for relief. Brahma sent them to Shiva, and Shiva sent them to Vishnu, who promised to have a portion of himself incarnated as Krishna to destroy Kansa. Another portion of himself or of the endless serpent Shesha, on which he reclines and which is also sometimes considered to be a part of himself, was to be incarnated as Balarama, Krishna's older brother, to be his companion and helper. Not long after this it was prophesied to Kansa that he would be slain by a child of his female cousin (or sister) Devaki and he was about to have her killed, but her husband Vasudeva persuaded him to spare her on condition that Vasudeva make over her children to him as fast as they were born. In this way Devaki's first six sons were destroyed, but the seventh, Balarama, was transported while still a fetus to the womb of Rohini in Gokula, across the river from Mathura, where he was born and raised in safety. Kansa held Vasudeva and Devaki in prison under strong guard. Devaki's eighth pregnancy was with Krishna. When born, he revealed himself to his parents as the Primeval Being Adipurusha, dark-colored, wearing his crest and necklace, bearing ornaments, four-armed, with the attributes of Vishnu in his hands, namely, conch, discus, mace, and lotus. All the gods came to adore him. Then he erased the memory of this vision from his parents' mind so that they thought him only a mortal child, which they feared Kansa would slay. But miraculously Vasudeva was enabled to escape from prison and ford the river Yamuna, which subsided when Krishna's foot touched the water, and with his infant son in his arms he carried him to Gokula, there to substitute him for the newborn daughter of the herdsman Nanda and his wife Yashoda, who in turn miraculously lost all recollection of the fact that the child actually born to them had been a girl.

Now follows in Krishna's life a large number of infancy and youth stories, some indicating his divine powers, some depicting his irresistible charm. In the first category are his triumph over creatures sent by Kansa to destroy him or over

jealous gods who try to humble him. For example, Kansa sent a demoness named Putana, who smeared her breasts with poison, arrayed herself in her finery, went to Yashoda, took up the infant Krishna, and started to nurse him. But Krishna sucked the very life out of her so that she fell down dead, while no harm came to him. At another time Kansa sent a demon to ambush him in the forest when he was tending cattle, but Krishna grasped the demon by the foot, swung him around his head, and threw him to the ground and so killed him. At another time a demon in the form of a crane tried to swallow Krishna, but Krishna promptly defeated him. Once a huge serpent swallowed Krishna, his fellow cowherds, and their cows, but Krishna swelled in the serpent's belly until he burst it. Again, in the river Yamuna dwelt a noxious serpent named Kaliya, which harassed the people living nearby until Krishna fought with it, grasped it by the tail, whirled it about his head, and is represented either as slaying it or as sparing it at the intercession of its wives on condition that it and they leave the Yamuna to live in the ocean. Again, he slew a demon named Panchajana and won from him the conch Panchajanya, which is one of his attributes. Once the god Brahma stole the cows and cowherds, but Krishna, that great illusion-maker, made others that were exactly like those which had been carried off. On still another occasion the rain-god Indra and Krishna were engaged in a contest because Krishna advised the cowherds not to worship Indra. Indra sent a great flood of rain to wash aways the herdsmen and their cattle, but Krishna raised Mount Govardhana over them and supported it on the tip of his finger, thus sheltering them beneath it for seven days and nights until Indra acknowledged Krishna's superiority and stopped the deluge.

Of the incidents which illustrate Krishna's charming childish and youthful behavior, some may be mentioned. At one time Yashoda discovered him eating dirt. She reproved him and commanded him to open his mouth so that she could remove it, but when she looked inside she saw there the entire three worlds. He used to interfere with the milkmaids

(*gopī*) when they were churning butter, or steal and eat the butter. Once for his pranks he was tied to a post or a mortar. He pulled this mortar along until it stuck between two trees, and then by the exercise of divine strength he uprooted the trees, whereupon there stood forth two beautiful young men, sons of the god Kubera, who had been cursed by the sage Narada to become trees until Krishna should release them. When Krishna was five, Nanda and Yashoda went to live in the forest of Vrindavana (Radha's forest), and there Krishna insisted upon becoming a cowherd. He grew up in the forest, ever playing his flute, with which he charmed the cowherds, the milkmaids, and the cows alike. Once he came upon a party of milkmaids while they were bathing and he stole their clothes and took them to the top of a tree, making them beg for their return. Later, in the month of Karttika (October–November), he called them to the dance he had promised when he stole their clothes. They came deserting their husbands, longing for Krishna. He at first danced with them in the circle dance called the rasalila, then abandoned them, and they searched for him in despair; then he returned and danced with them again, exercising magic yoga power to multiply his body so that each girl thought she had him as a partner. Of all the girls his favorite was Radha, who is considered to be an incarnation of Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort, and it was with her that the real Krishna danced. The love of Krishna and the milkmaids (gopis) and especially his love of Radha are celebrated in lyrics, paintings, sculpture, and there is a whole body of erotic literature and even of erotic cult practice connected with this aspect of the Krishna myth. He dances with the gopis; he swings with them, above all with Radha; he is shown with the god of love Kama in company with them; he and Radha have their separations, their misunderstandings, their ecstatic reunions. Through all these adventures as the darling of the milkmaids he never incurs the jealousy of their husbands, who view these affairs with no dismay, for they too are under the spell of Krishna's charm. Even the matrons of Mathura cannot resist him. When he went to that city to beg food of the

Brahamans, the latter refused him but they were foiled by their wives, who gave it and reaped the reward.

When the right time came, Krishna went to Mathura, where after a number of adventures he slew the wicked King Kansa and restored Ugrasena to the throne, while he and his brother Balarama took up their residence in that city. Later, when other enemies appeared, Krishna built the citizens of Mathurà a new and safe city called Dvaraka on the western coast of the peninsula of Kathiawar. Finally, when his mission was accomplished, he and his brother Balarama died and were reabsorbed in the godhead of Vishnu and the endless serpent Shesha.

The character of Krishna in the epic *Mahabharata* is quite different from that of Krishna in Gokula, Vrindavana, and Mathura. In the *Mahabharata* he is chiefly represented as a warrior, a mighty fighter, who uses guile as well as skill in arms. He worships Shiva and befriends Arjuna, the commanding field general of the Pandavas, representatives of righteousness, in the war with their cousins the Kauravàs, who represent evil. It is as counsellor of Arjuna that he recites the *Bhagavad Gita.*

The setting of the *Bhagavad Gita* is dramatic. The physical scene is the field of the impending battle, with the rival armies drawn up opposite each other. Arjuna, the beau ideal of warriors, goes in his chariot with his charioteer Krishna to the no man's land between the two armies. There he surveys the enemy whom he is bound to slay, and sees in their ranks kinsmen, friends, his teacher; and his heart fails him. His limbs sink down, his irresistible bow falls from his hand, his mind is distraught. No longing for victory does he feel when it has to be won at such expense. World rule would be only a grief. Moreover, by destroying his own family, he would undermine the very structure of society. He would produce lawlessness, from which would come corruption of the women, and this would lead to caste mixture. Only hell could be the fate of him and his followers. Better would it be for him to let the other side slay him unresisting. Unnerved, he collapses in the pit of the chariot.

But Krishna, to whom Arjuna has told his despondency, is no mere charioteer but an incarnation of Vishnu. Though born a warrior, he is by force of circumstances obligated to abstain from fighting in the great battle. However, he has associated himself with the side of righteousness and become Arjuna's charioteer in a status that might be called benevolent non-belligerency. Arjuna has some measure of awareness of Krishna's high origin, though far from a complete one, and so he puts the problem before him, asking for instruction. Little does he suspect how full an answer he is to get. For Krishna in the remaining seventeen chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* deals with the structure of society, the duties of its respective parts, including that of the warrior caste (Kshatriya), to which Arjuna belongs, cosmogony and cosmology, man's psychological organization, the nature of god, the goal of human existence, the ways to reach that goal.

Krishna is called the Exalted or Blessed or Adorable One (*bhagavat*) and he begins his discourse, called *gītā* (song) by answering Arjuna's immediate question. But in doing so he almost at once touches upon most of the other topics. In fact, he touches upon many topics wherever else in the *Gita* he deals with any single one as a starting point. For all the topics are interrelated, and the *Gita* is meant to be a "practical" work, aiming to give an exposition of all important matters of life and religion.

Krishna tells Arjuna that as a Kshatriya he has a duty to fight. Especially, in a war of righteousness he should not withhold his hand. But he need not fear real harm in the highest sense; for the only real part of man is the soul, which is unitary in all men, is indestructible, and is in fact unknowable except by itself. This is the monistic idealism of the Upanishads. Under further questioning, Krishna goes on to explain the purpose of life, which is to know God. He announces himself as God, and in the climax reveals himself to Arjuna in all his majesty and glory. The ways to God are various. One is by works, doing one's duty fully but doing it selflessly, without attachment, that is, seeking no end except the performance of duty for its own sake. Another way is by knowledge,

seeking and attaining perfect knowledge by means of intensive concentrated meditation, a way of the greatest difficulty, which only the rarest of men is capable of pursuing successfully. There is, however, still another way, which is easier and better, namely, that of loving devotion (*bhakti*) to God. One who adopts that will be accepted by God; Krishna will always receive the true seeker. Devotion is thus the way by which all men can reach God. They need not be profound metaphysicians or iron-willed adherents to duty. The simple, but devout and loving, heart is enough. By means of it one can gain the fullest knowledge, can know God, can win to Him. Such a one, in fact, has a special advantage: "I am the same to all beings," says Krishna. "There is no one either hateful to Me or dear; but those who adore Me with loving devotion, they are in Me and I too in them." (9.29)

Arjuna absorbs all the teaching, acknowledges Krishna as God, is heartened, and prepares to enter the battle, which his side is destined to win. Meanwhile the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* has let him and the world know that God can be reached by man's effort, and that the best means of reaching God is by loving devotion to Him, for God himself is Love.

In the two personalities united in Krishna the common theme is love, love which runs the gamut from the simplest to the highest. The infancy legends show Krishna as the charming child of destiny, adored by all good creatures, aided by them when he needs help and in his turn aiding them in their need, a child full of heart-enthralling tricks, lovable and loving, reciprocating love with the maximum capacity of which a child is capable. In his youth he is the lover whom none can withstand and whom none envies. Playing the flute, dancing with the gopis, he lives a life of untrammeled joyousness with his companions in a never-never land, where they prove all the simple pleasures. He is India's apotheosis of infancy and youth. But this is far from all. In his relations with Radha and his mass love affair with the gopis he symbolizes the relation of god with the human soul; he is the individual god of each human being, yet really one and indivisible, whom all reach. This is also the teaching of the

Bhagavad Gita. Through many ways all come to the same goal; deliverance follows merely because of the search. One may even seek him as enemy and still win him, for in some of the legends those who attack him and are slain by him nevertheless are taken by him into his heaven. This all-encompassing love of God is then the central theme of the Krishna legend, which has both endeared the bucolic hero to millions of worshipers and at the same time has made the *Bhagavad Gita* the favorite book of other millions, including Gandhi. The mythology of Krishna is a mythology of a natural human emotion, which is complex in its many manifestations, yet simple in its need of gratification. When recognized and gratified it is man's best hope—or so, at least, the followers of Krishna maintain.

5. THE MEDITATIVE ASCETIC GOD

Among the remains of the prehistoric Harappa civilization which flourished in the valley of the Indus during the third and second milleniums B.C. are representations on seals and pottery of a human figure seated in a posture later used by practitioners of the yoga system of meditation or flanked by worshipers. In one case the figure is accompanied by serpents; on two seals it is three-faced and on one of these it is surrounded by various animals. These figures are generally interpreted as representing a deity, and the resemblances between them and aspects of the god Shiva, as he is known in historical times, were pointed out in 1931 by the late Sir John Marshall in the book *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization.* We cannot categorically affirm that these figures represent Shiva or even an older form of some one of his constituent elements, but there is a *prima facie* case in favor of such an identification, while no other suggestion has been offered that is as plausible.

The implication of such an identification, if correct, would be momentous. It would mean that those aspects of Shiva which associate him with serpents, know him as Pashupati, "Lord of Creatures," and connect him with the practice of asceticism and the use of yoga postures and conventionalized gestures of the hands and fingers (*mudrā*), which are among the oldest known religious phenomena of India. There is even more. In the historic period Shiva is, and for two thousand years has been, commonly worshiped with a representation of the phallus as his symbol, while his wife Parvati is symbolized by the female generative organ. Unmistakable examples of the phallus have also been found in the Harappa culture, while other objects have been found which may represent the vulva, though the latter identification has been questioned. The problem presented by these items is one of the most fascinating in the history of Indian religions. The answer to it would presumably illuminate many other features of Harappan civilization besides the religious and would help to clarify the relationship of that civilization to later historic Indian civilization.

Shiva, like Vishnu, is a syncretic god with many strands woven together to compose his total self. He is the Vedic storm-god Rudra, "the Roarer." He is the Mountain-born One (*girija*), whose home is in the Himalayas. There on Mount Kailasa he and his wife Parvati live in perfect marital happiness. He is the righteous avenger, shocked at evil in high places, who punishes the god Brahma for incest with his daughter. He is Nataraja, "Lord of the Dance," who when the demon Muyalaka attacked him pressed his toe upon his back and broke it, and then with him underfoot danced the cosmic dance of creation, maintenance, and destruction, wherein his four arms and his feet are posed by Indian sculptors to represent that cyclic flux in what is one of the world's greatest plastic conceptions. He is the generative principle of the universe, the gigantic phallus which Brahma going upward and Vishnu going downward to seek its tip and its root tried in vain to measure. He produces the angry fire of dissolution at the end of an aeon, in which the universe

is consumed, to be re-created when he so wills. He and his wife Parvati lead a kind of nomadic camping-out life, often being shown with their two children, Ganesha, god of wisdom and remover of obstacles, and Karttikeya, god of war and patron of thieves, and accompanied by his vehicle, the bull Nandi, and her vehicle, a lion. They give succor to the poor and unfortunate, provided only the latter are pure of heart and devoted worshipers. He is a frequenter of isolated spots, a cave or a mountain height or a cremation ground strewn with half-consumed human corpses, infested with scavenging jackals, and haunted by man-destroying witches and demons. There he practices meditation, his body smeared with ashes, his hair uncut and heaped upon his head in a tangled mass.

The side of Shiva which commands our attention for the moment is that as the meditative ascetic. Just as archaeological remains of India's oldest civilization illustrate a yoga pose, so the oldest literature of India also records some notions and practices later associated with yoga. There is a Rigvedic hymn (10.136) which tells of ascetics (*muni*), wind-girdled, wearing soiled yellow garments, who follow the course of the Wind, when the gods have entered them. The ascetic flies through the air, the text goes on to say, "looking upon forms of every sort, the muni, incited by the gods . . . the long-haired one drank from the cup of poison with Rudra." The muni and the sun are being compared in this hymn, and in the comparison we see some of the ways by which the mystic experience of visiting the world of the gods, of practicing levitation, may be induced: leaving the body behind, the muni ascends in spirit, being under the influence of some poison, that is, some drug. In post-Vedic times Shiva is frequently represented as using a narcotic drink, made of hemp, and he is sometimes shown in eighteenth-century paintings in a Himalayan setting with his family, accepting such a drink from Parvati, who has just brewed it for him; it is evidently not the first he has had on that occasion, for his eyes are already glazed and rolling. The orders of ascetics, called sadhus or yogis, vowed to

his service, have long been notorious for their use of drugs to induce mystic sensations. The fullest mastery of yoga, Sanskrit texts tell us, can be won only when sought in intense asceticism, and the highest knowledge can be won only with the aid of yoga practice; hence Shiva, the practitioner of yoga, has also become the archetype of ascetic. He is described in a well-known poem called *Hymn of Praise to the Greatness of Shiva* (*Śivamahimnastava*, stanzas 9, 24) as follows:

A mighty bull, a skull-shaped club, an ax, a tiger's skin, ashes, serpents,
And a skull—this, and no more, is your chief paraphernalia;
But the gods possess their separate powers, entrusted to them by a flicker of your eyebrow;
For a mirage of objects of sense does not delude that one (Shiva) whose delight is in his soul.

Your sport is in burning grounds, O destroyer of Smara (god of love); pishachas (demons who devour the flesh of human corpses) are your companions;
For ointment on your body you use ashes from funeral pyres; your garland is a string of human skulls—
Let your character and your name as well be wholly inauspicious,
Yet, O gift-bestower, to those who call you to mind you are the supreme auspicious sign.

Though Shiva frequents macabre spots, his preferred place of meditation is the Himalaya. There in his devotion to the quest of knowledge of the Self he practiced meditation so devotedly and successfully that he conquered himself (*svaṃ jitavān*). But since his self is the Self, in conquering himself he won the greatest victory of all time. One time, however, he himself was vanquished, though the victor paid a penalty for his temerity. The familiar story was narrated fifteen hundred years ago by the great dramatist and poet Kalidasa in his *Ode in Celebration of the War God's Nativity* (*Kumārasaṃbhava*).

Once the universe was troubled by a noxious demon, so

powerful that even the gods were helpless before him. They learned, however, that if the god Shiva could be persuaded to have a son, he would be able to destroy the demon. This seemed difficult to manage; for Shiva was grieving for his wife Sati, who had recently died in consequence of slights heaped upon Shiva by her own father; and, further, he was in the high Himalaya absorbed in meditation. But it happened that the beauteous daughter of the Himalaya, Parvati by name, who was none other than a reincarnation of Sati, was seated nearby practicing austerities to win him as husband. The gods, therefore, delegated Kama (Desire), the god of love, also known as Smara (Memory), to take care of the affair. Kama set out accompanied by his wife Rati (Passion) and his adjutant Vasanta (Spring). When they reached the Himalaya, the snow and ice melted, soft breezes blew, flowers blossomed, all nature was filled with life and joy. Kama watched his opportunity, his bow of sugar cane full-drawn, a flower-tipped arrow in the string which was made of honey bees. At a moment when Shiva relaxed the intensity of his meditation, Kama let fly. The arrow struck home, and when Shiva felt it he glanced around, saw Kama, and flashed a fierce flame from his third eye, which utterly consumed Kama's body. But being a god and immortal, Kama did not die; only his body was consumed; hence he is often known as the Bodiless One (Ananga). But Shiva had glimpsed Parvati; the arrow did its work; a marriage took place; a son was born called Karttikeya or Kumara; and in due season the demon was slain and the universe saved.

Sects of wandering ascetics or sadhus devoted to Shiva go about India, practicing tapas (austerity), which an eminent Sanskrit scholar used to define as a "stunt" with a religious or quasi-religious end in view, and visiting the shrines sacred to Shiva that are dotted all over the subcontinent. They dress in ragged garments, often no more than the scantiest G-string, their bodies are smeared with ashes, their uncut hair is piled in snarled coils on their heads, their ears are pierced to hold great earrings. They go with staff in hand, or with Shiva's weapon and emblem, the trident, selling charms, professing to

perform miracles, sometimes accompanied by a female ascetic of similarly unkempt appearance. Unfortunately, these ascetics have an unsavory reputation. They are generally ignorant, seldom practice meditation, are economically unproductive, are held responsible for much mischief and crime, and the literature of India for almost two millenniums has testified to this record. Ascetic wanderers they may be, but seekers of the Self by conquering themselves through meditation they all too often are not. Sometimes they may be sincere devotees of asceticism and meditation for true religious ends, but sometimes they may be cultivating yoga for base purposes, seeking only to gain the magic powers that may be acquired at an advanced stage in the progress toward complete mastery. And frequently, of course, they are only charlatans. Nevertheless to the folk, and doubtless to themselves as well, the mythology of Shiva is accepted as basic fact, and this belief gives status to ascetics using his name. The average person, who may have his doubts about a sadhu arriving in his community, also feels that he lacks sound criteria for distinguishing between the true seeker and the pretender, and does not want, does not dare to risk offending one who may possess supernatural and dangerous powers. Such is a consequence of the aura emanating from asceticism and yoga practice, whose mythology is part of that clustering around the mighty figure of Shiva.

6. THE GREAT MOTHER

Though we cannot be absolutely certain that some predecessor of Shiva or aspect of his being was a god in the times of the Harappa civilization in the third millennium B.C., we seem to have almost unarguable assurance that one of the many strands comprising the composite character of his wife Parvati has such an age. This is her role as the Great

Mother, one of her most important roles, and Sir John Marshall has pointed out the probable relationship. There have been found at Harappa sites many pottery figurines of pregnant females, corresponding in general appearance to figurines found to the west in Baluchistan, Elam, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Cyprus, Crete, the Cyclades, the Balkans, chiefly in the second millennium B.C. It is considered that in Western Asia these are representations of the Mother Goddess, or the Great Mother, or the Earth Mother, whose worship was generally observed throughout all this region, and it is assumed therefore that the same worship existed in the Indus Valley.

Unfortunately, it is not until long after the period of the Harappa civilization that we get literary records in India expounding beliefs about the Great Mother, and relating mythology connected with her. We hear of her in literature of the middle and late classical periods, especially in the Puranas, from A.D. sixth century on, and also in the Tantras, whose dates are indeterminable though probably later than those of the Puranas. She appears as a part of the syncretic deity Parvati, known also by the names Uma, Gauri, Ambika, Durga, Kali, Chamunda, Minakshi, and many others, including especially the name Devi (goddess), that is, *The* Goddess par excellence. The reason why we do not hear of her sooner doubtless is that the Great Mother is not Aryan in origin and was late in getting Brahmanic recognition. She is quite different from any of the female deities of the *Rig Veda.* It is true that in early post-Rigvedic times we find literary allusions to ideas similar to some associated with Devi, such as the lotus on the waters, symbolizing the earth in the cosmic ocean, while in early Buddhist sculpture of the second and first centuries B.C. we see vegetation rhizomes and lotuses, which as the late Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy pointed out are assimilated to representations of the deified earth, but these items become associated in Brahmanic Hinduism with Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu, rather than with Parvati, and though originating in a popular sphere are elevated in Brahmanic thinking to the realm of symbolized metaphysics.

The Great Mother goddess, the Earth Mother, is widely worshiped in India today in non-Aryan circles; in South India every village has its collection of Ammas, or Mothers, and their worship is the chief religious exercise of the village. Frequently one of these is the head of the sorority, while the others are local deities manifesting particular powers or having control over limited subjects. The priests of such deities are not Brahmans, as are those serving other aspects of Parvati in the great temples, but are members of lower castes, thus indicating the pre-Aryan, or at least non-Aryan, worship of these goddesses. Mother Goddess worship is also prevalent in the north, and sculptures of the Mother Goddesses appear in India in mediaeval times. Gradually such deities, and especially the Great Mother goddess, make their way into Brahmanical Hinduism, to become best established in Tantric literature. But the Scriptures dealing with them and with Parvati as the Great Mother are Agamic or non-Vedic, as contrasted with the Vedic or Nigamic. The Great Mother conception still has a dubious position in Brahmanic circles.

It is not easy to tell what aspects of Parvati's multiple person are outgrowths of her character as the benevolent Great Mother and what aspects belong to figures developed apart from the Great Mother. There is the horrific form of Ambika, created with the most powerful qualities of all the gods, who slew the otherwise invincible buffalo demon Mahishasura; there is Chamunda, who destroyed the demons Nishumbha and Shumbha. There is Kali, who in her elation at annihilating demons danced until the earth rocked and the gods feared for its safety, whereupon they called upon Shiva to intercede, and he lay down before her until she danced on his body and then in shock stopped. In such forms she rides upon a terrifying lion, and has many arms carrying an immense array of weapons. These sides of her godhead demand bloody sacrifices, the usual victim being a goat, but legends tell of human victims as well. It is hard to reconcile these fierce figures with the kindly, benevolent parts of the complex. Her mythology also tells us that by practicing

intense asceticism she won as her husband Shiva, the great lord of procreation. Once she had won him, she remained ever true, but not always the eternal homebody taking care of their two sons and running the household, though paintings and stories may show her in such guise. Rather than a Griselda, she is a demanding, quick-tempered wife, quite ready to resent a real or fancied slight, or be jealous of some other of Shiva's ladies, such as Sandhya, the Twilight, or the heavenly river Ganga (Ganges), who has lived in Shiva's hair ever since he caught her there when she descended from heaven and would have overwhelmed the earth.

The final word in Parvati's history was reached when she was identified by followers with the all-powerful feminine principle considered to be the fundamental and dominant element in the universe. In this phase of her character she is generally called Devi (The Goddess), though her other names are applicable as well, and many words meaning mother are applied to her, such as matri, janani, amba, and others. The feminine principle is known as Shakti (*śakti*, a feminine abstract noun meaning "power"), and worshipers of that principle as the supreme principle are called Shaktas (*śākta*). Such worship is part of the whole large section of Hinduism known as Tantrism, because its texts are called Tantra. It is centered around Shiva and Devi, though every god has his Shakti, without which he is powerless. As a much esteemed mediaeval ode to Devi (*Saundaryalaharī*) says, "If Shiva is united with Shakti, he is able to exert his powers as lord; if not, the god is not able to stir." He is, in short, in the latter case only unrealized potentiality. In Shakti worship the feminine principle far outweighs the masculine. So dominant is it that it is only through Devi's grace that all the various other gods have their powers. If Devi were to close her eyes for but an instant all the cosmos would disappear including the gods. Her motherly concern keeps her from doing so and preserves the universe with all its helpless and dependent creatures. When the cyclic great dissolution finally comes, all does disappear except Shiva, whom she saves out of wifely devotion.

Devi's supreme position among the gods as the first principle of the universe is forcefully affirmed in Shakta texts. The *Saundaryalaharī* (Flood of Beauty) tells much about her. The Scriptures (*śruti*) wear her feet as their crest. She is mind and the five material elements, namely ether, air, fire, water, earth. She is also the supreme and unseconded Intelligence and pure Bliss. Anyone who really comes to understand her complete nature can master the whole universe, apparently because he becomes one with her. The gunas, or strands of the material universe, which are white, red, and black, are hers and their colors are the colors of her three eyes; for, like her husband Shiva, she has an additional eye. In her lies all love. She inspires Kama, god of love. Let a worn-out old man, unattractive and long since become incapable in the art of love, but chance to fall in one of her side glances, and he is transformed into an irresistible youth, whom bevies of young women pursue, their hair flying loose, the bodices slipped from their swelling breasts, their girdles burst, their garments dropping down. One who worships Devi throws a spell over the heavenly nymphs, and even the triple universe, conceived as a woman with the sun and moon as her breasts, is agitated by him. She embodies the whole power of creative love, from which everything springs. But besides this kind of love, she also embodies motherly love. To her devotee she is all grace and maternal concern. He calls upon her as a child addresses its mother, and she cherishes him, taking him to herself, so that he at last becomes one with her, experiencing a flood of supreme joy, tasting boundless intense bliss. Thus he wins to salvation and life everlasting.

At some time, date unknown but probably before A.D. 1000, the Shakti cults accepted the notion that there resides within the human being a power known as kundali or kundalini, which normally lies asleep in the form of a serpent in three and a half coils surrounding a penis in a mythical center or circle (*cakra*) or nerve plexus at the base of the spinal column. By the use of yoga techniques one can awaken this power and cause it to ascend to five other mythical cen-

ters lying one above the other along the spinal column. As one becomes more adept, he can cause it to rise ever higher until at last, when his mastery is complete, he can cause it to pass above the sixth center and reach the thousand-petaled lotus (*sahasrāra*) assumed to exist at the top of the cranium. The six centers are described in various texts in terms which indicate that they represent in the human being as microcosm similar centers in Devi's body as macrocosm, while the thousand-petaled lotus represents her residence in her essential and non-material form. From there, having Shiva as her mate, she evolves into the six elements of the material universe in stages. In the highest of them she produces mind, then in the one below ether, in the one below that air, and in the remaining three fire, water, and earth. This completes the evolution: the world is thus born having Devi and Shiva as mother and father.

When a human being causes his kundalini power to ascend he is retracing within his microcosmic self the steps of macrocosmic creative evolution, and when he causes it to reach the thousand-petaled lotus he has reached the state of non-material unevolved and unmodified first principle. This is man's highest good, and it constitutes indescribable bliss, for he has attained to pure being.

There exist a number of Shakta cults, falling into two fairly distinct groups. One is the Samayin or dakshinachari (right-hand) school and the other is the Kaula or vamachari (left-hand) school. The latter has various kinds of extreme practices, including the erotic. Of these the most notorious is that of the pancha-ma-kara, use of the five essentials of worship, the word for each of which begins with the sound of the letter *m*, namely wine (*madya*), meat (*māṃsa*), fish (*matsya*), finger-gestures (*mudrā*), and sexual intercourse (*maithuna*).

Tantrism as a whole and Shakta cults as a part of it have a large place not only in Hinduism, but also in the varieties of Buddhism existing in northern Bengal, Nepal, and Tibet, and in certain cults of Jainism. Their beginnings we cannot see, but they may be of the greatest antiquity. Though we

cannot say categorically that they existed in the Harappa civilization 4200 years ago, representations there of the phallus (*linga*) and possibly the vulva (*yoni*), in form much like the representations in historic India, constitute presumptive evidence that they did. In that case the mythology of sex power would have existed then too, probably in association with the whole generative process as symbolized by the notion of the earth as the Great Mother, and so we may not unreasonably say that this aspect of religion was the earliest in civilized India, as indeed it may well be thought to have been in many other parts of the world.

7. THE HUMAN TEACHER AS SAVIOR

Two of the great religions of India are recognized by their adherents as well as by Western scholars as having been founded by human beings. These are Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, who probably lived 563–483 B.C., though the traditional Sinhalese dates are equivalent to 624–544; Jainism was being preached at the same time by Vardhamana Jnataputra, generally known as Mahavira, whose dates are given by the Jains as corresponding to 599–27 B.C. or variantly by modern scholars as 539–467 or 549–477 B.C. He taught a doctrine in the tradition of a predecessor named Parshva, who, the Jains say, died two hundred and fifty years before him. Parshva was probably the founder of the faith, Mahavira a preacher who added or modified a few points and popularized it. Both Mahavira and the Buddha carried on their activities in the present Bihar and the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh in northern India.

The sixth century B.C. was a time of great religious and philosophical creativity and also of economic expansion in that region. Commerce was thriving, large cities were coming

into existence, trade routes to both East and West had become important, a wealthy aristocratic land-holding group had established itself, a rich merchant middle class was rising in the urban centers. Presumably the population was increasing, too. Small states were developing, out of which grew larger ones until in the latter part of the fourth century B.C., Chandragupta Maurya created the first great Indian empire with its capital at Pataliputra (modern Patna) on the Ganges in Magadha in Bihar. Conditions were favorable in this region for a revolt, or any rate a protest, against the Brahmanism of the late Vedic period. The latter frankly regarded cities as places of evil and taught that the religious life could be cultivated only in forests. It affirmed also the overriding power of the elaborate Vedic sacrifice performed by Brahmans according to an ancient ritual of the greatest complexity and carrying unrivaled authority. The Brahmans arrogated to themselves, as custodians and sole competent officiants of this all-important ritual, a position of moral and social superiority to both the old temporal military and governing aristocracy and the newly developing merchant middle classes. At the same time, this region had been only imperfectly Aryanized. The river Gandak, which enters the Ganges hard by Pataliputra, had not many centuries before been regarded as the eastern boundary of the Aryans, and Magadha and the regions beyond it had been looked upon with contempt by the authors of the sacred Brahmanic texts. Hence it was only natural to find the powerful nobility and the rich middle classes there restive before the Brahmans' pretensions.

Even within orthodox Brahmanic circles there, that is among those who acknowledged the authority of the Vedas, there were some with a skeptical attitude toward the excessive Brahmanic ritualism. Videha, adjacent to and north of Magadha, was the scene of some of the most important speculative discussions recorded in the Upanishads. These works as a class recognize validity in the ritual, but, having given it that much service, go on to teach a higher knowledge concerning the soul and the reality in the universe. Janaka, king of Videha, was himself an inquirer, who welcomed

philosophers to his court that he might discuss ultimate truth with them. As there were seekers who honored the Vedas, so there were others who had no reverence for those works, and side by side with Upanishadic speculation there existed unorthodox inquiry and teaching. Thus the gentle and moderate Buddha and the austere Mahavira shared something despite their anti-ritualism with the rather crabbed Yajnavalkya, who is pictured in the Brahmanic texts as philosopher and ritualist alike.

It was to the landed aristocracy and the rich urban merchants that Jainism and Buddhism made their appeal. Both faiths denied the validity of the Vedic ritual; both rejected the claims of Brahmans to the maximum holiness and the highest social status merely by reason of birth, proclaiming on the contrary that one is a Brahman only by reason of his conduct. Such teaching made them heretics (*pāṣaṇḍa*) in Brahmanical eyes, but it gained them the patronage of the politically and economically powerful. Each faith also, in promulgating its doctrine, abstained from using the Brahmanic language, Sanskrit, which at that time had its center to the west of Bihar, and instead used dialects locally current, Pali for Buddhism and Ardhamagadhi for Jainism, which became the vehicles of their canonical texts. Still further, each preached a new ethical doctrine, that of Ahinsa (*ahiṃsā*) or non-injury of living creatures. This was not known at all to early Vedic literature; the word appears only once in the older Upanishads and there most inconspicuously; even the *Bhagavad Gita,* though employing it four times, again does so without any emphasis or elaboration, so that Professor Franklin Edgerton can say of the doctrine in the *Gita* that "some lip-homage is paid to it. But it is never definitely and sharply applied in such a form as 'Thou shalt not kill.'" In fact the *Bhagavad Gita's* immediate aim is to inspire the reluctant Arjuna to do his duty as a Kshatriya and fight the battle of righteousness, destroying evil without feeling qualms at slaying those who support it. To Jainism and Buddhism, however, Ahinsa was the first of all ethical principles. They preached it constantly in a thou-

sand ways and with such success that it made its way into Hinduism as well and was firmly established there early in the Christian era.

Buddhism and Jainism represent their great teachers or Saviors as being born in Kshatriya families, not Brahman, and in this respect they remind us of the parentage of Rama and Krishna. Jainism goes even further, for it maintains that when the soul of Mahavira descended from the Pushpottara heaven to be born on earth it was first conceived in a Brahman woman's womb. But the god Indra, becoming aware of this, reflected that all Saviors (*tīrthaṃkara*)—Jain mythology recognizes a series of twenty-four—were born in Kshatriya families, not Brahman. To prevent this latest Savior from being born of a Brahman woman, he sent the general of his army, Harinaigameshin, a deer-headed fertility deity, to transfer the embryo from her womb to that of the pregnant Queen Trishala, and this he did, putting both women into a deep sleep, and then exchanging the two embryos. Thus Mahavira had a prenatal history not unlike that of Krishna and Krishna's older brother Balarama.

In Buddhism and Jainism an extensive mythology has developed around the great teachers who became Saviors, much richer than the brief credible data we have concerning them and far more significant to Jains and Buddhists, just as the legend of Christ has meant more to Christians than have the bare historical facts. In each religion, also, the legend has expanded as the centuries have passed. The lives of the two masters have a good deal of similarity along broad lines, although details differ, as if there had been in India an informally accepted pattern of myth appropriate to great teachers. The mythic conception of each teacher has echoes of Vedic myth, as in employing some of the characteristics and epithets of the Vedic idea of the sun as conquering hero. Jain mythology also has many points of contact with the mythology of Krishna; of the sixty-three "outstanding personages" in Hemachandra's great work, twenty-seven have been shown to be associated in one way or another with

Krishna. There is, in short, a certain degree of relationship between Buddhist, Jain, and old Brahmanic mythology.

Before their historical and final existences the Buddha and Mahavira had had innumerable others as many kinds of beings. Buddhism recounts far more of these than does Jainism, and one Buddhist work alone (*Jātaka*) deals with 547 of them. With each of these teachers the last life before the historical life was one of great duration spent in a heaven. Conception is accompanied by wondrous dreams; Mahavira's mother sees fourteen (a variant account makes the number sixteen); Siddhartha's mother sees a white elephant entering her side. Marvelous dreams regularly accompany the conception of a Great Person (*mahāpuruṣa*). Shortly after conception both fathers have the dreams interpreted by wise men, who announce that the child is destined to be either a universal emperor or a world savior; in the case of the Buddha a second prediction is made after the birth, when the sage Asita, who has seen a host of divine beings in the sky rejoicing that a future savior has been born, goes to the place they indicate, looks at the babe, sees it has the thirty-two characteristic bodily marks of a Great Person, and then, like the Christian Simeon, prophesies its destiny and at the same time is saddened that he himself will not live to see the prophecy fulfilled. Siddhartha's mother gives birth standing up and the child comes forth from her side, while she dies seven days later, as do the mothers of all Buddhas; but Mahavira's mother produces her child lying down and in the usual manner, and does not suffer premature death. Gods attend the infants at birth. There are various legends of childhood and youth concerning both, especially in non-canonical texts, recounting the schooling, the selecting of a bride (or brides), encounters with friendly and unfriendly superhuman creatures. These legends are different from those relating to Krishna's infancy and youth, while one of the two great divisions of Jainism, the Digambara (Sky-clothed) Jains, whose monks go naked, deny that Mahavira ever married. Each future teacher lives in his father's palace, sheltered from the world, gently nurtured, enjoying luxury

and all possible pleasures, and the father of each wishes the worldly career of universal emperor for his son. Buddhist legend tells that Siddhartha is awakened when the gods give him successively sight of four premonitory signs, heretofore never seen by him—an old man, an ill man, a dead man, who together illustrate the misery of life, and finally a monk, who illustrates the method of finding release from that misery. In the Jain legend the gods come to Mahavira when he is thirty years old, adjuring him, "Propagate the religion which is a blessing to all creatures in the world!" Mahavira then resolves to leave the world, gives away his possessions, goes forth in a palanquin, which he presently has stop under an ashoka tree. There he dismounts and dismisses it; then he removes all his ornaments and plucks out his hair in five handfuls, which the god Indra receives. Siddhartha, however, having first viewed his young son and disgustedly looked at the women of his harem, repulsive in their sleep, goes forth secretly in the dead of night, riding his horse Kanthaka, with his charioteer Channa holding on to its tail, while gods keep its feet from striking the ground and the city gate rolls back for him. Thirty leagues away he reaches a river, which the horse leaps across; then the prince dismounts, gives his ornaments to the charioteer, and cuts off his hair with his sword. Each of the two great beings thus renounces the world to undertake the religious quest.

Mahavira's search was one of unrelieved austerity and meditation lasting for twelve years. The texts recount his many sufferings, the hardships from cold, hunger, attacks of wild beasts, the rage of a fierce poisonous serpent whose very look carried death, the hostility of barbaric folk who sicked the village dogs on him; the seductions of women. At length during the thirteenth year he obtained omniscience, while deep in meditation, standing in the body-abandonment posture, and so became a Conqueror (*jina*), and the gods descended from heaven and ascended in honoring him. Then, as they always do for Saviors, they prepared the ground for his first sermon, cleansing it for the space of a league, erecting three walls, the first of jewels, outside it one of gold, and

outside that one of silver, with each wall having four jeweled gates. In the center was a tree, and under the tree four lion thrones. Mahavira occupied that on the east, and duplicates of him occupied the others. There he preached to gods, men, animals.

Siddhartha's course was very different. He first went to two religious teachers, whom he found unable to give him the answers to his search, though they taught him how to achieve certain states of concentration in meditation. Then for six years he practiced rigorous asceticism, in company with five disciples, until his body wasted away to unbelievable thinness and he all but died. But still he did not win enlightenment. He therefore gave up asceticism, ate normally, and step by step gained enlightenment, winning in trance knowledge of his previous existences and the means of destroying the defilements, with final realization of truth. Thus he became the Buddha (Enlightened One). Later accounts add incidents of his approach to the meditation spot and a lurid description of his temptation by Mara (the Evil One) as he sat under the Tree of Enlightenment (*bodhi*). When he had won the victory, he decided that he would first preach it to his five disciples, who were still practicing austerities. They, when they saw him approaching, determined not to rise and greet him, since he had abandoned the life of mortification, but, as he drew near, the glory acquired in his achievement could not be withstood and they arose involuntarily. Thereupon in a deer park at Sarnath, just outside Varanasi (Banaras), with them as audience, he preached his first sermon, by which he set rolling the wheel of the Law, and they became his first converts.

The teachers now both set forth on a long career of preaching, wandering through the countryside and visiting towns and cities, and the texts relate many marvelous and miraculous incidents, astonishing conversions of great rulers and rich merchants, defeats of hostile superhuman adversaries, victories over rival teachers. Each established an order of monks and an order of nuns and corresponding groups of laymen and laywomen, thus leaving a fourfold congregation.

Mahavira died at the age of seventy-two and his liberated soul went to the Siddhashila, or Ishatpragbhara, which is at the top of the universe. This resembles an inverted white parasol, being made of pure white gold, 4,500,000 leagues in diameter, eight leagues thick at the middle, but tapering off till at the edges it is thinner than a fly's wing. All varieties of perfected beings (*siddha*) go there; of these the Saviors (*tīrthaṃkara*) are the foremost. There they dwell in omnipotence and omniscience, perfectly blissful, and with no contact with the material universe.

The Buddha was eighty when he died. He had already realized that the time for his death was at hand, and he was ready. In his wanderings he came to a village, where he stopped in a mango grove belonging to a smith named Chunda. This pious follower provided a meal of many kinds of food, including a good deal of something called sukaramaddava, sometimes understood by commentators to mean pig's flesh and sometimes understood to mean something which pigs eat, such as a vegetable, mushrooms or truffles. The Buddha would not allow his disciples to eat this dish, for when he examined it, he saw that only a Buddha could digest it, but even at that it brought on his final illness. He traveled on ill, but as the end approached he gave his followers various sorts of instruction, including a charge that no blame should be attached to Chunda. At last, after passing through the various trances, he attained final Nirvana.

The lives of the historical Saviors have stimulated a vast mythology of other, non-historical and purely mythical, Saviors, thought to have existed in remote ages before them. In Buddhism we find first that there was a doctrine of six preceding Buddhas; later the number was increased to twenty-four; elsewhere there is a list of fifty-four, then one of more than a hundred; still later the number is considered in some sects to be unlimited. Among the mythical Buddhas is reckoned Dipankara (the Lightmaker), to whom the historical Buddha, at that time a child, offered a handful of dust, making a resolution that he would himself in some future existence attain enlightenment. Further, Buddhism in

one of its two great divisions, the Mahayana, has cultivated a notion of Bodhisattvas, beings whose designation means that they have enlightenment (*bodhi*) as their essence (*sattva*); this was the designation of the historical Buddha up to the moment when he actually won enlightenment. The Mahayana sects consider that the Bodhisattvas have reached such a stage of spiritual development that they could, if they wished, attain Buddhahood, but they prefer not to do so, since a Buddha can have no contact with the world. They therefore remain Bodhisattvas, performing good works so that the benefit from these may accrue to other beings and help them on the road to salvation.

In Jainism the two historical Saviors have been multiplied to twenty-four. That number, however, is only for the cycle in which we now live. Jainism teaches that the universe has already gone through a beginningless series of similar cycles, each of an astronomical length of years, and will go through an endless future series. The movement of cycles is like a hand traveling incessantly around the face of a clock. When it is at the top, the world is in the best of conditions; from that state it steadily deteriorates until it reaches the lowest point, one of maximum evil; then it starts to improve and so ascends again by stages to the best of states. At a certain point in the deterioration conditions become so bad that rulership is needed; men can no longer digest uncooked food; learning becomes necessary. Then the first Savior appears, who is also the first king. He teaches the arts, such as pottery making, cooking, writing, arithmetic. He also preaches the Law. He is succeeded in the rest of the downward or deteriorating period of the cycle by the other twenty-three. All twenty-four Saviors are very real to the Jains; their achievements are honored; images are carved to represent them and temples are dedicated to their memory. Each cycle has such a series, born to preach salvation for souls wandering in the otherwise beginningless and endless round of rebirth.

The tendency to translate teacher to supernatural Savior or deity is not without existence in India today. It would not be irrational to suppose that neither the Buddha nor Ma-

havira thought of himself as anything more than a human being who had found an answer to life's great problem and was preaching it to those who would listen. But their followers, perhaps within their teachers' own lifetime, were magnifying them, ascribing to them supernatural powers, possibly making deities of them. Great teachers or leaders are sometimes so treated by their immediate disciples in modern India, but rarely do they become the founders of a continuing religious order. That seems, in part at least, to be a matter of chance. When Gandhi died in 1948 there were many people in India ready to deify him. This would have been abhorrent to Gandhi himself, a man as humble as he was sincere. It was, in fact, a dread of some of Gandhi's closest friends and most devoted admirers, who spoke publicly against the tendency. There now seems to be no likelihood that he will ever become an object of worship, the resort for salvation of hundreds of millions of Indians. But for a time in 1948–49 it looked like a close thing. If it had happened, he would have been in our time a successor to the tradition of the Buddha and Mahavira, the human teacher become Savior.

8. THE USES OF MYTHOLOGY IN INDIA

The different varieties of mythology treated here show it serving a variety of uses as well. It has, in the first place, represented man's natural wish to have an explanation of his environment—how did the universe come into being and how does it operate; where did man come from; what are the functions and the relationships of the various parts of nature, the sun, the moon, the wind, storms, drought, floods; what is the source and cure of disease? Mythology thus embodies India's most primitive scientific ventures.

Out of this develops the second use of mythology, that is,

as a stimulus to metaphysical speculation. In the symbols of mythology we find the earliest recorded efforts of Indians to explain the universe as a whole, to find the first cause. For the intellectually unsophisticated the myth may be reality, but to the sophisticated it is only symbol, from which they pass on to exact and rational investigation. Mythology is in this way the portal to philosophy. And as in India philosophy and religion have never been separated, but both have been wedded for a teleological purpose, so mythology has expressed man's religious desires, above all that of gaining future happiness in another existence, in a word, salvation, however that may be imagined.

Third, mythology, such as is attached to Rama or as appears in the *Mahabharata*, has served the purpose of history. In the culture of India, more than in that of the Greeks and the Chinese, mythology is almost the only sort of history the traditional literature presents.

Fourth, mythology has provided expression for the basic human emotion of love. This includes love for children and love by children, love between man and woman, love of the human being by God, and love for God by the human being. It even includes love of the animal creation.

In the fifth place mythology in India symbolizes the study by man of himself, the winning of self-knowledge and self-mastery, as by Shiva. It translates to a divine sphere the need of such mastery, won by renunciation and mental application. We might say that India has used mythological symbolism as psychology.

The myths that have accumulated around the figures of Mahavira and the Buddha illustrate its sixth use, which is to establish human capacity as unlimited, to teach the dignity and worth of man.

Seventh, mythology has been used to satisfy the human craving for entertainment and edification. Its tales have given to people a mirror of their own hopes, fears, gratifications, disappointments, heroism, baseness. The oldest preserved narratives in India are mythological; the oldest hints we have of drama are in the dialogue hymns of the *Rig Veda*. Myth-

ological themes have been the subject matter of literature, have suggested plots, have led to the development of narrative frankly conceived as fiction.

Finally, mythology has been used to inspire aesthetic expression. It has given subject matter for most of the traditional sculpture and painting; it has inspired the building of noble temples.

Put in another way, we may say that in India man has found mythology a vehicle to carry him to the exploration of science, philosophy, religion, history, sex, love, his own psychology, literary entertainment and edification, creation of art.

For us, looking in from outside, acquaintance with India's mythology can be a first and easy step in the study of that land's culture.

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PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSLITERATION OF WORDS FROM SANSKRIT AND RELATED INDIAN LANGUAGES

In pronouncing Sanskrit and other words from the languages of India and Ceylon appearing in this essay, speakers of English should accent the next to the last syllable when it is long, and otherwise put the accent on the nearest long syllable before it. A long syllable is one which contains:

a vowel marked long: *ā, ī, ū;* or
a diphthong: *e, o, ai, au* (in Sanskrit *e* and *o* are always diphthongs and long; in most words from other languages appearing in this essay they are also long); or
a vowel followed by more than one consonant, but note that *h* following a consonant usually represents an aspiration of the consonant, not a second consonant, and therefore does not serve to make the syllable long.

The pronunciation of vowels is approximately as follows:

a like *u* in English but
ā like *a* in English far
i like *i* in English pin
ī like *i* in English machine
u like *u* in English pull
ū like *u* in English rule
e like *ai* in English chair
ai like *ai* in English aisle
o like *o* in English go
au like *ow* in English how
ṛ like *ri* in English river

The following remarks apply to consonants:

c like *ch* in English church
g like *g* in English go
ś and *ṣ* like *sh* in English rush

The sounds represented by *t, d, n,* are made with the

tongue farther forward than in the pronunciation of English *t, d, n,* while *ṭ, ḍ,* and *ṇ* are made with the tongue turned farther back, but casual users of words may in both cases employ the English sounds.

The aspirates *th, ph, kh* may be pronounced like the *t, p,* and *k* in tin, pin, kin; the nonaspirates *t, p, k* may be pronounced like the *t, p, k* of English stun, spin, skin. The aspirates *dh, bh,* and *gh* may be approximated by imitating the combinations of *d, b,* and *g* with *h* in English roundhouse, clubhouse, doghouse. Otherwise the consonants are to be pronounced like the English consonants.